

Theatre Glossary

acting areas - see *center stage, downstage, stage left, stage right, and upstage*.

***actor** - a person, male or female, who performs a role in a play or an entertainment.

actor's position - the orientation of the actor to the audience (e.g., full back, full front, right profile, left profile).

antagonist - a person, a situation, or the protagonist's own inner conflict in opposition to his or her goals.

***articulation** - the clear and precise pronunciation of words.

***audience** - people who watch, listen and respond to live theatre.

blocking - the planning and working out of the movements of actors on stage.

body positions - see *actor's position*.

***center stage** - the center of the acting area.

***character** - the personality or part an actor recreates.

***characterization** - the development and portrayal of a personality through thought, action, dialogue, costuming, and makeup.

climax - the point of highest dramatic tension or a major turning point in the action.

cold reading - a reading of a script done by actors who have not previously reviewed the play.

collaboration - the act of working together in a joint intellectual effort.

complication - see *rising action*.

***conflict** - the opposition of persons or forces giving rise to dramatic action in a play.

context - the interrelated conditions in which a play exists or occurs.

***costume** - any clothing worn by an actor on stage during a performance.

***creative drama** - an improvisational, process-centered form of theatre in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect on human experiences.

crisis - a decisive point in the plot of a play on which the outcome of the remaining actions depends.

critique - opinions and comments based on predetermined criteria that may be used for self-evaluation or the evaluation of the actors or the production itself.

cue - a signal, either verbal or physical, that indicates something else, such as a line of dialogue or an entrance, is to happen.

design - the creative process of developing and executing aesthetic or functional designs in a production, such as costumes, lighting, sets, and makeup.

denouement - the final resolution of the conflict in a plot.

dialogue - the conversation between actors on stage.

***diction** - the pronunciation of words, the choice of words, and the manner in which a person expresses himself or herself.

directing - the art and technique of bringing the elements of theatre together to make a play.

director - the person who oversees the entire process of staging a production.

downstage - the stage area toward the audience.

***dramatic play** - children's creation of scenes when they play pretend.

dramatic structure - the special literary style in which plays are written.

dress rehearsals - the final few rehearsals just prior to opening night in which the show is run with full technical elements. Full costumes and makeup are worn.

electronic media - means of communication characterized by the use of technology (e.g., radio, television, and the Internet).

ensemble - a group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical production.

epic theatre - theatrical movement of the early 1920s and 1930 characterized by the use of such artificial devices as cartoons, posters, and film sequences distancing the audience from theatrical illusion and allowing focus on the play's message.

exposition - detailed information revealing the facts of a plot.

form - the overall structure or shape of a work that frequently follows an established design. Forms may refer to a literary type (e.g., narrative form, short story form, dramatic form) or to patterns of meter, line, and rhymes (e.g., stanza form, verse form).

***formal theatre** - theatre that focuses on public performance in front of an audience and in which the final production is most important.

genre - literally, kind or type. In literary and dramatic studies, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally tragedy and comedy. The term can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific subgenres of tragedy and comedy, such as the comedy of manners.

***gesture** - an expressive movement of the body or limbs.

***improvisation** - a spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.

***informal theatre** - a theatrical performance that focuses on small presentations, such as one taking place in a classroom setting. Usually, it is not intended for public view.

***level** - the height of an actor's head as determined by his or her body position (e.g., sitting, lying, standing, or elevated by an artificial means).

***locomotor movement** - see **space**

***makeup** - cosmetics and sometimes hairstyles that an actor wears on stage to emphasize facial features, historical periods, characterizations, and so forth.

masks - coverings worn over the face or part of the face of an actor to emphasize or neutralize facial characteristics.

melodrama - a dramatic form popular in the 1800s and characterized by an emphasis on plot and physical action (versus characterization), cliff-hanging events, heart-tugging emotional appeals, the celebration of virtue, and a strongly moralistic tone.

mime - an ancient art form based on pantomime in which conventionalized gestures are used to express ideas rather than represent actions; also, a performer of mime.

monologue - a long speech by a single character.

motivation - a character's reason for doing or saying things in a play.

musical theatre - a type of entertainment containing music, songs, and, usually, dance.

objective - a character's goal or intention.

pageant - any elaborate street presentation or a series of tableaux across a stage.

***pantomime** - acting without words through facial expression, gesture, and movement.

***pitch** - the highness or lowness of the voice.

play - the stage representation of an action or a story; a dramatic composition.

playwright - a person who writes plays.

plot - the structure of a play, including the exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action and denouement,

production values - the critical elements of a production, such as acting, direction, lighting, costuming, sets, and makeup.

***projection** - the placement and delivery of volume, clarity, and distinctness of voice for communicating to an audience.

***props (properties)** - items carried on stage by an actor; small items on the set used by the actors.

proscenium - the enlarged hole cut through a wall to allow the audience to view the stage. It is also called the proscenium arch. The archway is in a sense the frame for the action on the stage.

protagonist - the main character of a play and the character with whom the audience identifies most strongly.

***puppetry** - almost anything brought to life by human hands to create a performance. Types of puppets include rod, hand, and marionette.

***reader's theatre** - a performance created by actors reading script rather working from memory.

rehearsal - practice sessions in which the actors and technicians prepare for public performance through repetition.

run-through - a rehearsal moving from start to finish without stopping for corrections or notes.

script - the written text of a play.

***sense memory** - memories of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. It is used to help define a character in a certain situation.

***set** - the onstage physical space and its structures in which actors perform.

***space** - an element of dance that refers to the immediate spherical space surrounding the body in all directions. Use of space includes shape, direction, path, range, and level of movement. *General space* refers to actors moving throughout a given area (walking or running from one place to another, also referred to as **blocking**). *Personal or self space* refers to the movement of the actor *in place or within a body bubble*.

***stage** - the area where actors perform.

stage crew - the backstage technical crew responsible for running the show. In small theatre companies the same persons build the set and handle the load-in. Then, during performances, they change the scenery and handle the curtain.

stage manager - the director's liaison backstage during rehearsal and performance. The stage manager is responsible for the running of each performance.

stage left - the left side of the stage from the perspective of an actor facing the audience.

stage right - the right side of the stage from the perspective of an actor facing the audience.

***stock characters** - established characters, such as young lovers, neighborhood busybodies, sneaky villains, and overprotective fathers, who are immediately recognizable by an audience.

style - the distinctive and unique manner in which a writer arranges words to achieve particular effects. Style essentially combines the idea to be expressed with the individuality of the author. These arrangements include individual word choices as well as such matters as the length and structure of sentences, tone, and use of irony.

subtext - information that is implied by a character but not stated by a character in dialogue, including actions and thoughts.

***tableau** - a silent and motionless depiction of a scene created by actors, often from a picture. The plural is *tableaux*.

text - the printed words, including dialogue and the stage directions for a script.

***theatre** - the imitation or representation of life performed for other people; the performance of dramatic literature; drama; the milieu of actors, technicians, and playwrights; the place where dramatic performances take place.

theatrical conventions - the established techniques, practices, and devices unique to theatrical productions.

theatrical experiences - events, activities, and productions associated with theatre, film/ video, and electronic media.

theatrical games - noncompetitive games designed to develop acting skills and popularized by Viola Spolin.

upstage - used as a noun, the stage area away from the audience; used as a verb, to steal the focus of a scene.

***vocal projection** - see *projection*.

***vocal quality** - the characteristics of a voice, such as shrill, nasal, raspy, breathy, booming, and so forth.

***volume** - the degree of loudness or intensity of a voice.

Note: Vocabulary words marked with an **asterik *** are designated for grades K-2 Drama.